Gingrich May Put Disputed Tax-Cut Bill to Vote

By Stephen Barr
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House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) said yesterday he may send a GOP tax-cut bill to the floor this week even if Republicans continue to disagree over a $500-per-child tax credit for upper-income families.

"We don't have a compromise yet. We're still arguing. I'm not sure we'll get to a compromise. I mean, we may just bring the bill up and see what happens," Gingrich said on ABC's "This Week With David Brinkley."

House Republican leaders are negotiating with GOP moderates and fiscal conservatives on a plan linking tax cuts with long-term deficit reduction. The $188 billion "Contract With America" tax package contains a $500-per-child tax credit for families earning up to $200,000, but a group of more than 100 Republicans supports lowering the income ceiling to $95,000.

Despite the dispute and Democratic attacks that the bill mostly benefits the rich, Gingrich sounded optimistic about the measure's chances on the House floor. He noted the bill contains a 50 percent reduction in the capital gains tax and repeal of a tax increase on wealthy Social Security recipients and added, "I think there will be surprisingly more people who will decide voting yes is a good idea."

Moderate Republicans and conservative Democrats also have argued in recent days that tax breaks should not be approved unless they are linked to the budget deficit. Acceptance of the so-called speed bump provision would cancel the tax cuts if Congress failed to meet interim deficit-reduction goals.

Gingrich said he and House Budget Committee Chairman John R. Kasich (R-Ohio) "like that provision. We think it's a good thing to keep locking Congress further and further into getting to a balanced budget."

During his television appearance, Gingrich also:

- Indicated his support for efforts to turn over to the states in lump-sum payments called block grants the $88 billion that the federal government spends on the Medicaid health care program for the poor. "I think what we will do is require that people have access to health care but allow the states to have a very broad framework within which to define how they want to provide it," Gingrich said.
- Predicted President Clinton would veto the GOP tax bill and some spending cuts. The Republican budget and appropriations bills will "zero out a lot of programs," Gingrich said, suggesting that up to four Cabinet departments would be abolished, overhauled or have their programs consolidated.
- Suggested that Amtrak rail service would not remain immune to budget cuts. "I think ultimately we'll privatize Amtrak."
- Rejected Democratic calls for an independent counsel to investigate ethics complaints filed against him in the House. "The charges are explicitly false. They know they're false. . . . Why would you allow a member [of Congress] to smear somebody, and then honor the smear by getting an independent counsel based on a smear?"
- Supported Clinton's decision to support Mexico with loan guarantees during its financial crisis. "I think having Mexico collapse and having 5 to 15 million Mexicans decide to walk north would be catastrophic."
- Criticized the press for cynical news coverage. "The news media is the nervous system of a free society. . . . But if we can't find a way to talk about how we get to a balanced budget and if we can't find a way to talk about how we transform Medicare, if everything is reduced to cynicism and negativism, we can't, as a country, make the kind of decisions we need to make."